



Gay Fathers of Sacramento

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"Each man's life represents a road toward himself." --Herman Hesse

President's Corner By Ed Callahan

Writing the next chapter of your life

Books, books, books! In years past, there was very little written to address our issues as gay men and fathers. All that has changed gradually, with more books written to address issues for our niche in the market. Among this new wealth of words can be found both good information and some good advice. But even the best advice seems to come with a little danger. Back in the 70's one publisher thought there was a market for an odd little book called "If You Meet Buddha on the Road, Kill Him." Tough book — especially if you happen to be Buddha. (Hmmm... should that title worry me some as I get older and heavier? Some pounds need to go, but safe so far!)

Meanwhile, Stanley Siegel leads us into formerly untouched territory in his book *Uncharted Lives*. Like many gay dads, it was exciting for me to find aspects of my life story told for the first time in this book. When he described seeing as a young boy, for the first time, men naked, I traveled back to the era before puberty to the first recognition of the riveting beauty of male bodies in the changing room for the swimming pool. It brought me back to the smells and sights from the trip with my Dad to talk with a local college football coach in the locker room. And ... enough already! There was no question for Siegel as there was no question for me — a chemistry there was unleashed within an uncomprehending little body. Important information about my identity rushed into my life before I had the ability to process the experience, much less put it into words for others. But there was no question that something wonderful and scary had happened.

It took very little time and experience to learn that not every boy had the same reaction. Most guys let you know by talking about faggots and queers, letting you know which of your private feelings and experiences needed to be censored. Soon enough, the Big Silence about all feelings "gay" started and we knew better than to violate it!. Unfortunately, since the rules of the Big Silence were not published anywhere, some of us slow studies even shared their excitement with others. Like that older neighbor boy — did he know that there were athletes in the baseball locker room who were naked and showering after the early evening game? While the older boy looked at first blank and uncomprehending, his look quickly turned to disgust as he shook his head and walked away. Sheesh, where was Siegel's book when I was risking getting punched out at 12?

So, that little boy in me still felt

(see Callahan, page 3)

Don't Forget!

Monthly meeting
Sunday July 13 at 6 p.m.
at the Lambda Center
919 20th Street
Sacramento

GFS meets the second
Sunday of each month.



GFS at the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade: Tim, John and Mark

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Support Network
PO Box 161951

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Our Children by Rachel Gold

Needs differ for children of gays

When Abigail Garner's gay father separated from her mother during her first grade year, she was put into a "loss group" in her elementary school to learn to deal with the divorce. But she didn't understand why she belonged in the group. "I just gained a dad," she remembered thinking "what's my problem?"

Now Garner, 24, runs a monthly group for teen-aged children of gay, lesbian and bisexual parents, affiliated with Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG).

"Teens with gay parents face prank calls, derogatory jokes, harassment, other parents who forbid their children to accept an invitation to a gay family's home, and teachers making anti-gay comments during class," she pointed out.

Children can be reticent to join a support group, fearing that any perceived desire for support will be interpreted negatively by their gay or lesbian parent. But Garner said children of gays and lesbians need to interact with others like themselves for a sense of fellowship, to learn coping skills, and for understanding.

Issues are often different for children of gays and lesbians than for their parents. While parents often go through a grieving process when their children come out, Garner said children are more likely to accept a gay or lesbian parent, but to lack strategies for coping with the responses of their peers. Older children whose parents came out recently, may also face issues around their own sense of sexual identity, and their learned homophobia.

"The younger you are the easier it is," she explained. "For teens it's difficult because they already have [homophobia] instilled in them."

Sarah, 14, and Heather Regalado, 11, remember that when their mother came out to them as a lesbian she

wanted them to attend counseling, but they didn't want to go. Sarah recalled that their response to their mother's sexual orientation was, "oh, of course."

Asked if she would attend a group for children of gays and lesbians now, Sarah said, "if I had a problem, it would be OK." She added that she already has friends, and the idea of a support group "sounds boring."

However, when asked if she'd like to talk to kids in similar situations to hers, she said, "that would be really nice ... it's very good for people to have friends who know it, and it doesn't matter."

Her younger sister, Heather, said she probably wouldn't attend because she would be embarrassed to go, and because she doesn't want to get beaten up again. Two years ago, she was assaulted by an older child on a school bus after admitting her mother is a lesbian.

Going to the group would imply that "I needed help or something," she said, adding that she wouldn't go, "cause I don't want to get beat up and I don't want to be made fun of."

"There is a fear of other people at group finding out who you are," Garner said. "What I want kids to know is that I take confidentiality very seriously and that we are all in the same situation; we're all taking a risk by being there." She added that being under 16, attending a group without transportation can be difficult, especially when a child wants to conceal the nature of the group from friends or step-parents.

From her own experience talking with other children from gay and lesbian parents, Garner thinks the opportunity to have that connection is very valuable.

"They know they're normal, but for that time they're with other people who know they're normal," she said. Or as one 15-year-old told Garner,

"It's a place where we don't hear that our parents are the scum of the earth."

Sarah and Heather said they know one or two other kids who have lesbian parents. "I don't like to talk about it," Heather said. In the past few years she has experienced anti-gay comments at her school, and the circulation of a "rumor" that her mom is a lesbian.

Sarah said, "most people's reactions are like 'Ooh.'" But she waits to see which children are going to be good friends of hers before she tells them about her mother. "You really get to know if those people would ditch you in a second because your mom's a lesbian," she explained.

School can be a challenging environment for children of gays and lesbians who may hear frequent anti-gay slurs, or who can come under fire from their peers if they come out about their parents.

Last fall, when same-sex marriage was being frequently debated, Garner said she listened to the KQRS morning radio show denigrate gays and lesbians. While the radio aired the parents side of the debate, Garner explained, kids around the Minneapolis were also bringing up the gay marriage issues in classroom and playgrounds.

These kids are learning what their parents are saying," she said. One of the young women in her group called and told her she didn't want to go to school because of the way her classmates had been talking about gays and lesbians following the radio show's discussion. "I don't want to go somewhere where people hate my family," Garner quoted her as saying.

When she called the radio station to ask them to stop, Garner said she was told, "I don't know anyone like you." She responded that they probably did, but pointed out that few children of gays and lesbians come out about their parents, especially in hostile environments.

"It's exhausting to hide a major part of life ... because your parents are a huge part of who you are growing up,"

(see *Children*, page 3)

(Callahan, from page 1)

honored and titillated at recovering and sharing some of these experiences from the age of the Big Silence while reading *Uncharted Lives*. The book rang true frequently in those early pages, often capturing forgotten bits and pieces of my early years. For each reader, the path had to diverge at some point. For me, the story still rang true as he described falling "in love" with the first available gay man met after reaching the brink of gay self-acceptance. Reading about his transition from marriage was painful: a time when the penis chose to rule, shutting down parts of the brain ordinarily more discerning. The first love became the transition relationship used to leave marriage and begin life as a new man. Finally, the paths he described, diverged from my experience: he made a series of errors in trusting his new boyfriend, making self-destructive decisions, even leaving his job and child and moving out of state.

Other important differences exist as well. Siegel underlines the possible existence of recovered memories in sexually conflicted areas, noting that through part of his adult life he failed to remember gay experiences of adolescence and young adulthood. While married, Siegel even forgot a relationship in

graduate school of which his wife was aware. While this dramatically supports the existence of repressed memories when the stakes are high, it still amazes me that a man could lose contact with such powerful positive sexual experiences for so long. But then the guilt they triggered might mean that those experiences were not so positive.

All of this leads to Siegel sharing how he came to reject his initial belief (carried over from marriage) that monogamy was the way in which he wished to live his life. For the first time, Siegel becomes prescriptive in the book, noting that monogamy is a heterosexual rule of interaction designed to keep homes intact for the children. Siegel makes an excellent point in noting that as gay men, outside the social norms, we have the freedom to make our own rules. But while there is no reason for gays to live by heterosexual rules, monogamy can offer other payoffs to a couple: trust, increased sexual comfort, sexual safety (from disease), and enhancement of the chances a relationship will continue and thrive, for example.

But the reason for this essay is not to support the idea of monogamy: personal sexual rules are for each of us to devise and revise to match our experience and enrich our personal lives. My

decision that I want to live monogamously is only important to my partner and me, not to anyone else reading this. Instead my point is that we need to support the idea of an open and fluid marketplace of ideas and rules, rejecting the notion that there is a single correct solution to each problem. Siegel can describe his experience as a man, but he cannot describe mine, nor can I describe yours. So when a problem enters anyone's life, there is only one person expert enough to bring that problem to resolution, and that is the only person who can know and respect all that has occurred earlier, and can be in contact with his own voice about what should occur. For that reason, we start each Sacramento Gay Fathers meeting with the reminder that we come together to share our stories with mutual respect and support and not to give advice. Our goal is to support each other as each man writes his own unique next chapter of growing, of caring, of loving, and of living well.

Now the problem is: what do I do if I meet Stanley Siegel on the road? Hmmm ... I know what I want to do: give him a hug, tell him I enjoyed his book, and then continue on my path as he goes off on his, hopefully each sharing mutual respect and support while we continue to make unique and personal choices and grow. ▼

(Children, from page 2)

she explained. In order to hide their parents sexual orientation, some children will pull away from their peer groups in general, making it even more important that they meet accepting peers.

Garner's involvement with a support group began in January, 1995, when she saw a listing in a magazine for a group for children of gays and lesbian. They needed a facilitator, so she took the post. She left the Bridge a year-and-a-half later to run the PFLAG group because, she said, she wanted to work with an organization that focused on

gays and lesbians and their families.

The group is loosely constructed so that it can shape itself around the concerns and interests of its members, Garner said. They talk about everything from their parents dating, to Melissa Etheridge's decision to become a mother. If there's nothing to discuss, they'll play games or watch gay and lesbian documentary videos.

In March Garner received a Do Something grant for nearly \$500 to continue the meeting and her advocacy work. Garner also takes referral calls from PFLAG's helpline, fielding one to three calls a week about children of gays

and lesbians. She is working with a group of students at South High School who want to present panels to junior high schools students who will be attending their school in order to prepare them to enter a gay and lesbian friendly environment.

She has met with school teachers and counselors who have made themselves available as a resource for gay and lesbians youth, to encourage them to expand their focus to include children of gays and lesbians, and is trying to expand her work on speaking panels to include training sessions. ▼

Poetry & Quotes

I AM I! ME! I am I! And I may not know why
But I know that I Like it. Three Cheers! I AM I!

Dr. Seuss

(Mark W. wanted to pass on this bit of advice.)

[POEM]

DOES IT MATTER?

My father asked if I am gay,
I said does it matter?
He said "No not really."
I said "yes."
He said, "Get out of my house!"
I guess it mattered.

My friend asked me if I am gay,
I said, "Does it matter?"
He said "No not really."
I said, "Yes."
He said, "Don't call me your friend."
I guess it mattered.

My boss asked me if I am gay.
I said, "Does it matter?"
He said "Not really."
I said, "Yes."
He said "Your fired faggot!"
I guess it mattered.

My lover asked if I loved him.
I said, "Does it matter?"
He said, "Yes."
I told him "I love you."
He said "Let me hold you in my arms."
For the first time in my life something mattered.

My God asked me "Do you love yourself?"
I said, "Does it matter?"
He said, "Yes!"
I said, "How can I love myself? I am gay."
He said "That is the way I have made you."
Nothing again will ever matter.

Author unknown

(Dean D. found this on the Internet and thought it would be of interest to the group.)

"To be nobody but
yourself in a world doing
its best to make you
everybody else means to
fight the hardest battle
any human can ever fight
and never stop fighting."
-- e.e. cummings (poet)

[Poem]

THIRTY-SIX

Thirty-six years,
A wave hits the beach.
A long time ago
I became what I am --
Oceans apart,
Never in reach.

Thirty-six years,
The seagull is flying.
Today's another day
The man stands alone --
Completely alive,
But somehow dying.

Thirty-six years,
The sands always change.
Maybe tomorrow
My life will be full --
Free to be me,
It is within range.

Frank F. Lindsen

("I wrote this poem when I was making the decision to come out. I'm happy to report that now I have come out, my life is more full and I am free to be me!" -- Frank F. Lindsen)